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Cox et al.

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(54) **COMPACT HINGED CASKET HANDLE**

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A61G 17/02 (2006.01)

(52) **U.S. Cl.**
CPC ***A61G 17/041*** (2016.11); ***A61G 17/02*** (2013.01); ***A61G 17/0405*** (2017.05)

(58) **Field of Classification Search**
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USPC 27/27, 4, 14, 17, 2; 16/439, 424
See application file for complete search history.

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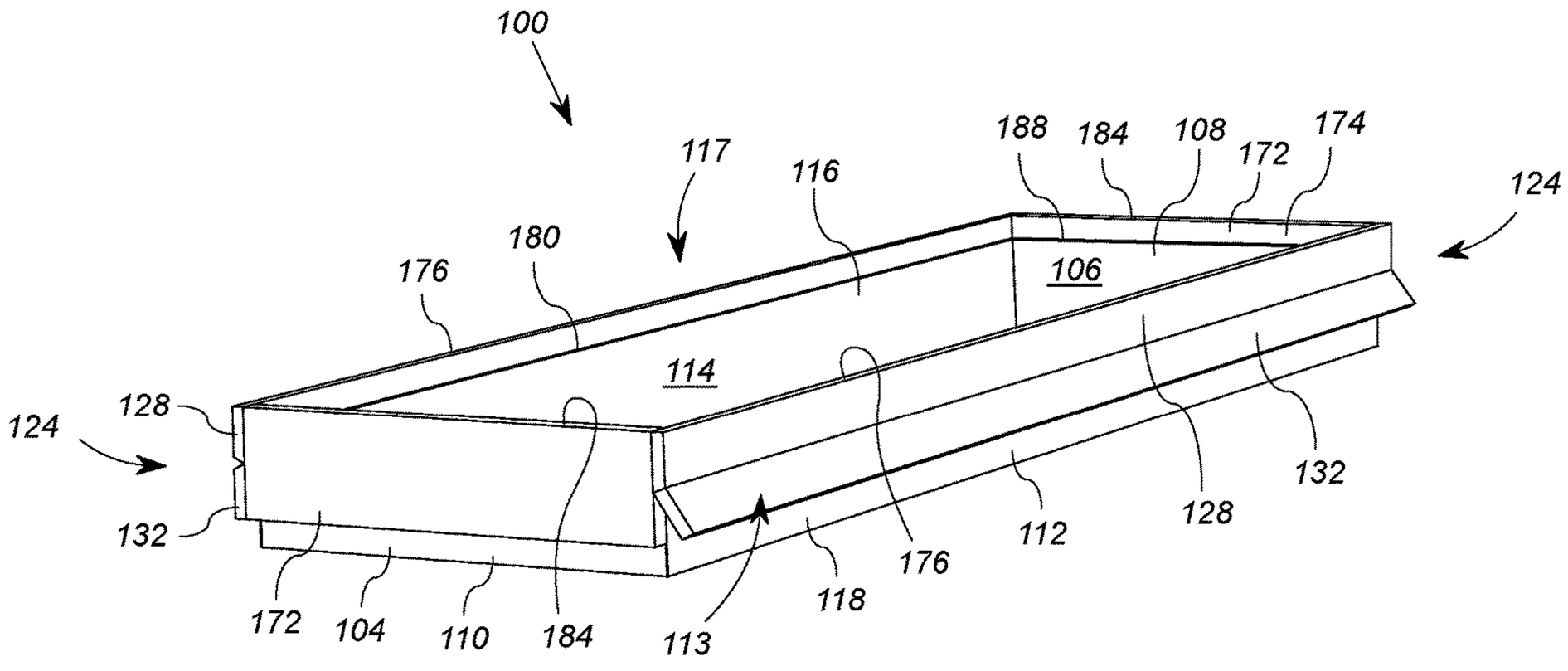
(57) **ABSTRACT**

A casket includes two side panel structures, two end panels, and a bottom panel. Each end panel is operably coupled to both of the side panel structures. The bottom panel, the two side panel structures and two end panels form, at least in part, a casket container configured to receive adult human remains. Each side panel structure includes a fixed member and a movable member. Each movable member is coupled to one of the fixed members such that each movable member is rotatable relative to the fixed members between a first position and a second position. When each of the movable members is in the first position, the outer surfaces of the movable member and the fixed member are substantially coplanar. When each of the movable members is in the second position, the outer surfaces of the movable member and fixed member are not substantially coplanar.

20 Claims, 8 Drawing Sheets



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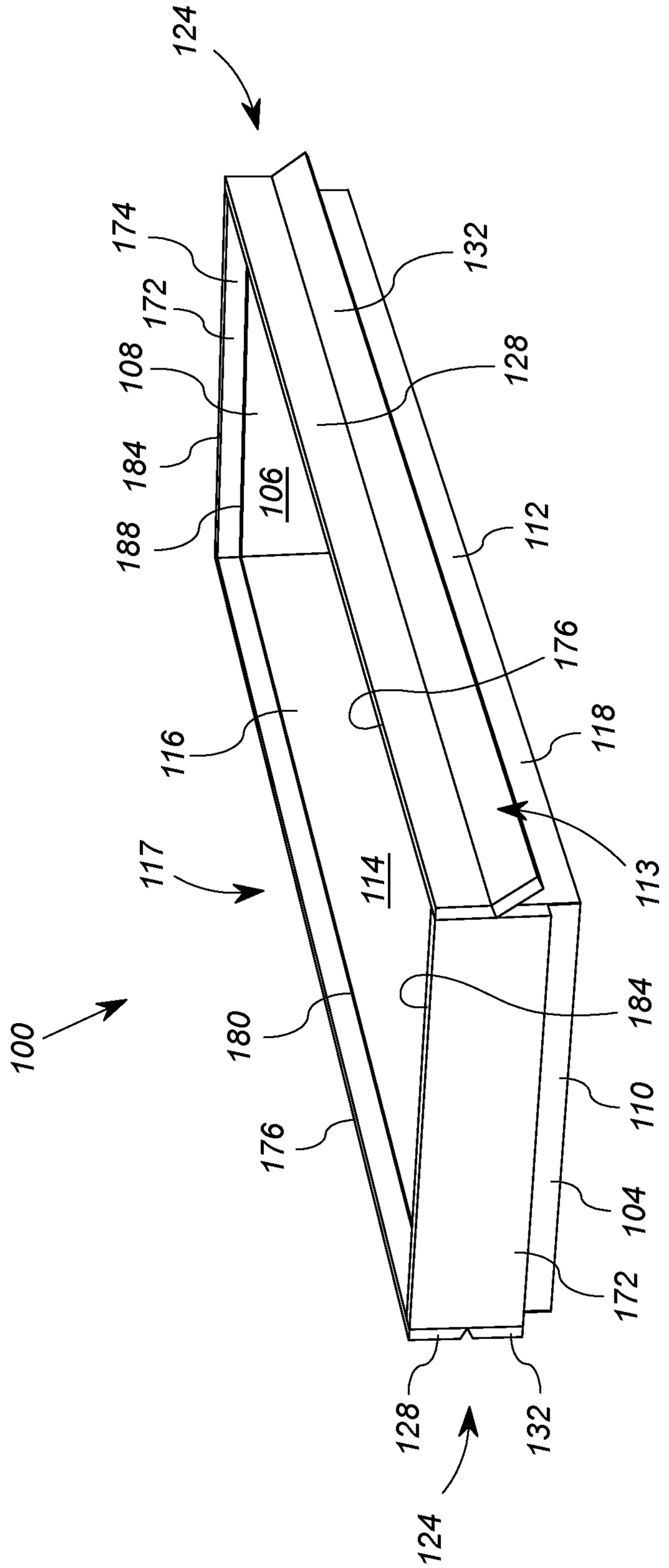
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FIG. 1

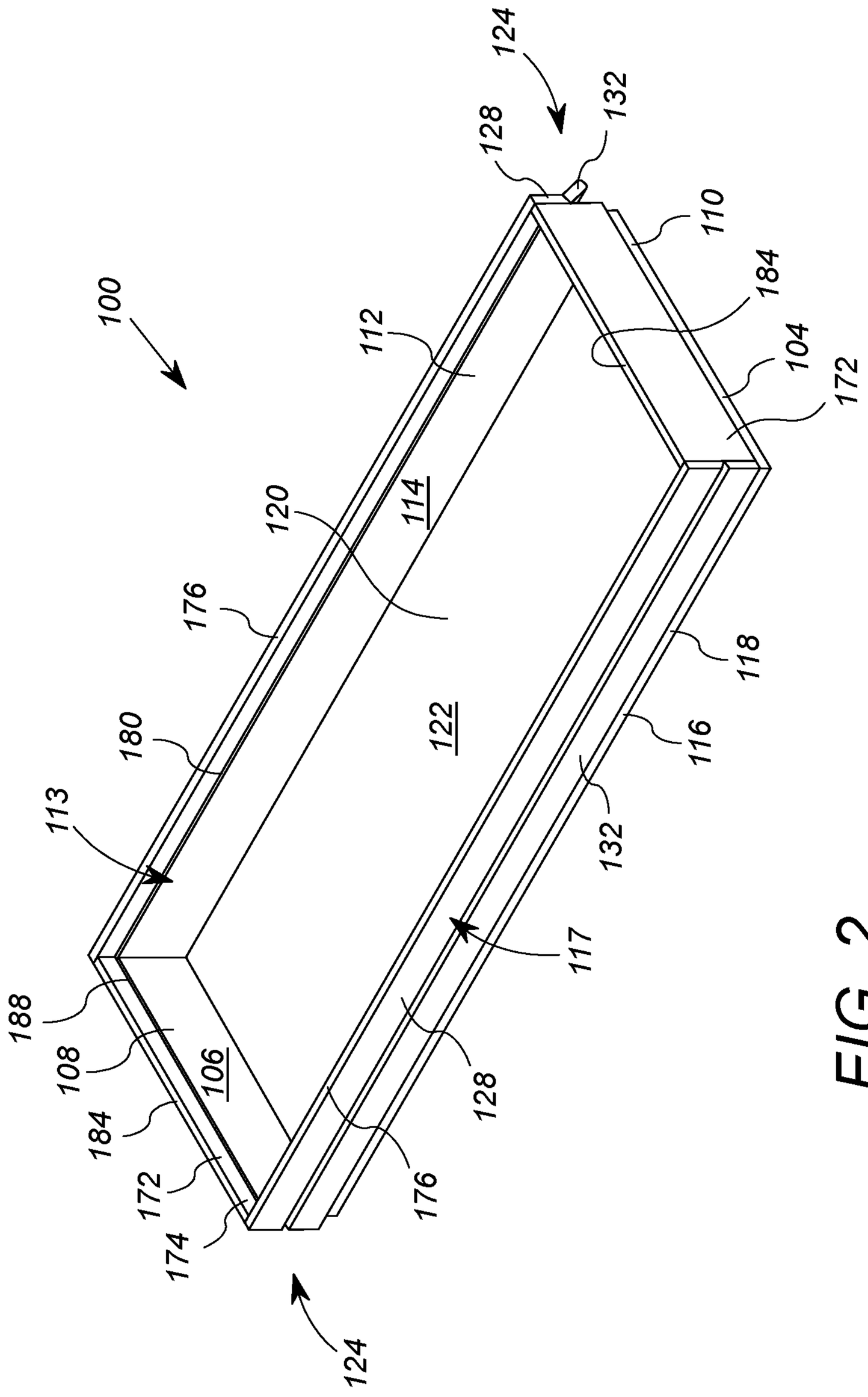
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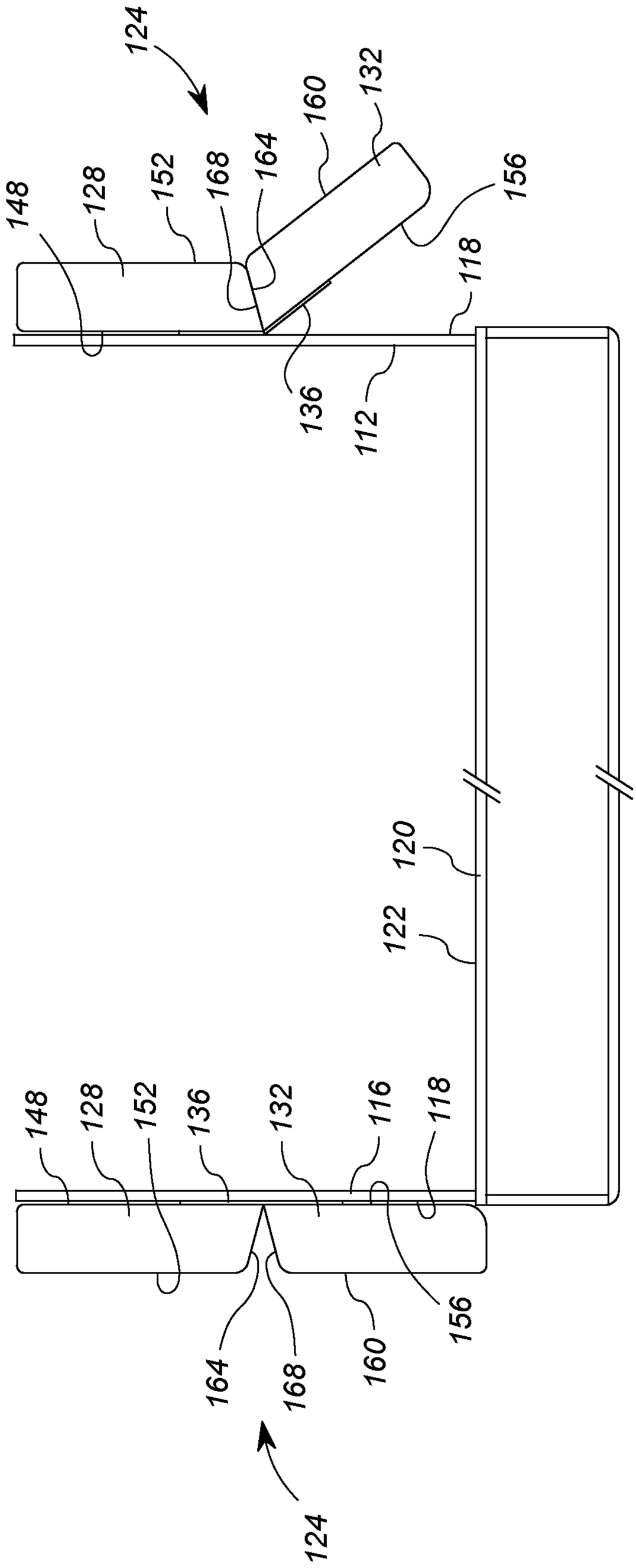
FIG. 2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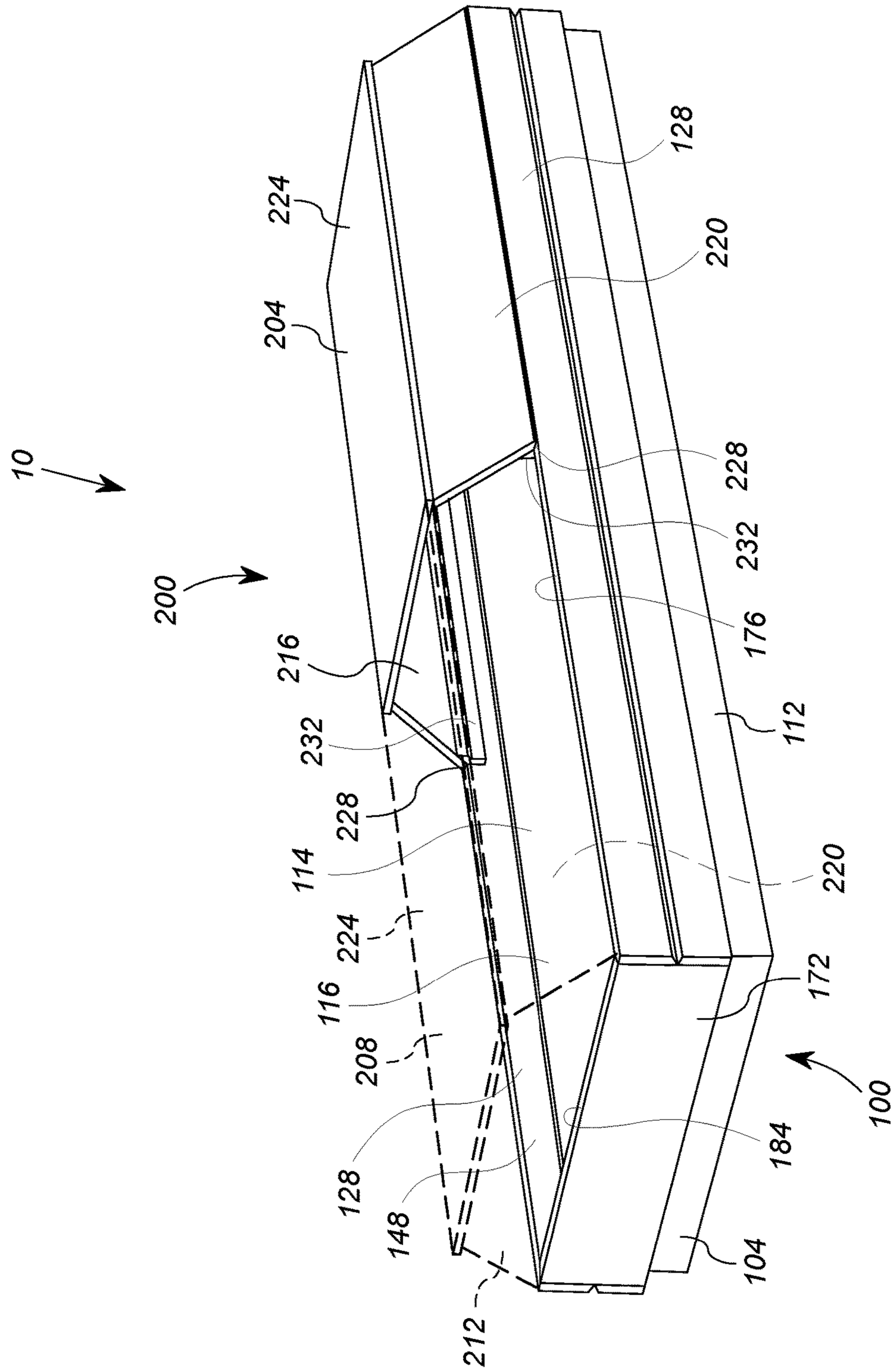
124

FIG. 3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228
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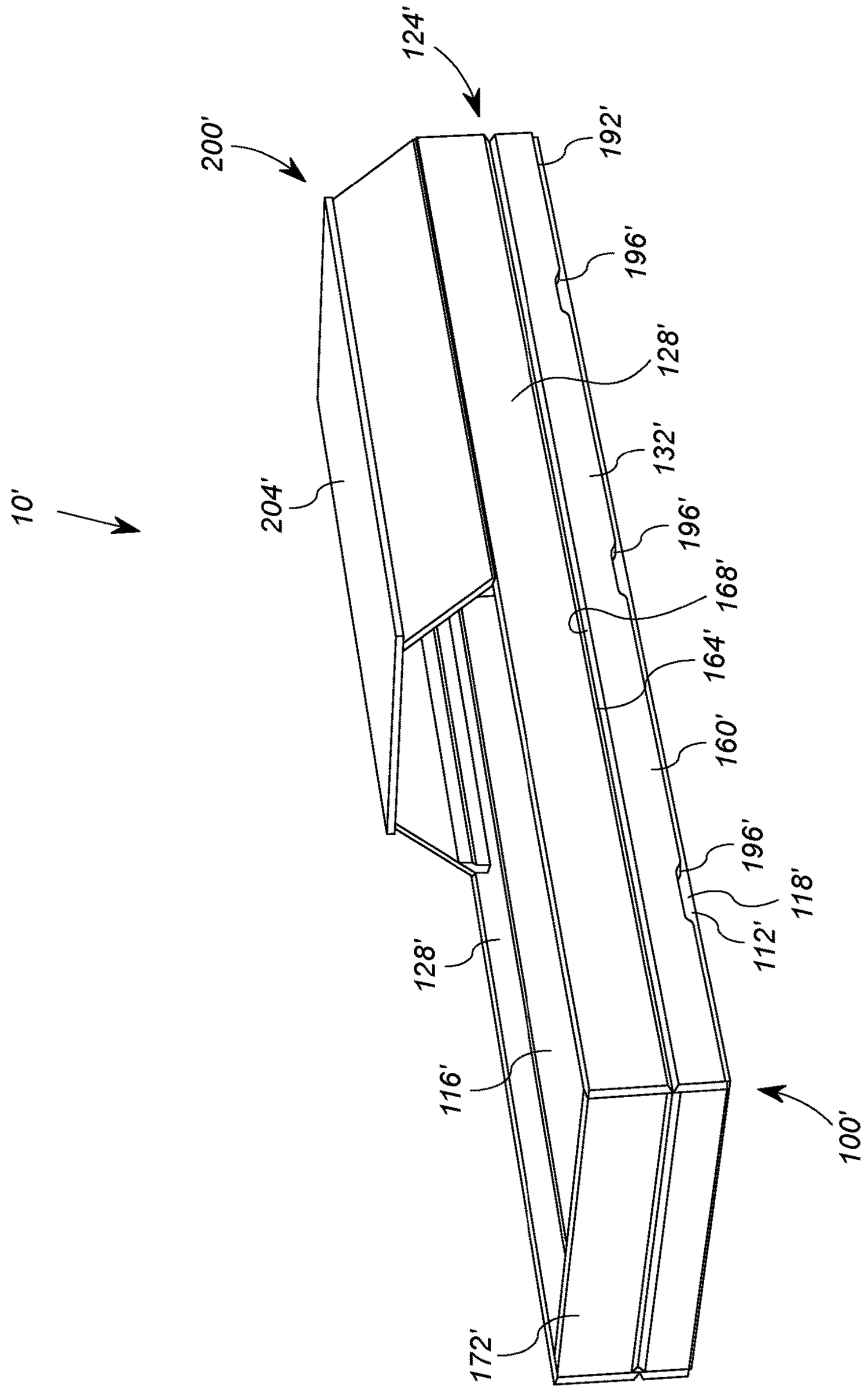
172
184
100
104

FIG. 4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192'
196'
128'
204'
132'
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168'
164'
160'
196'
118'
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116'
172'
100'

FIG. 5

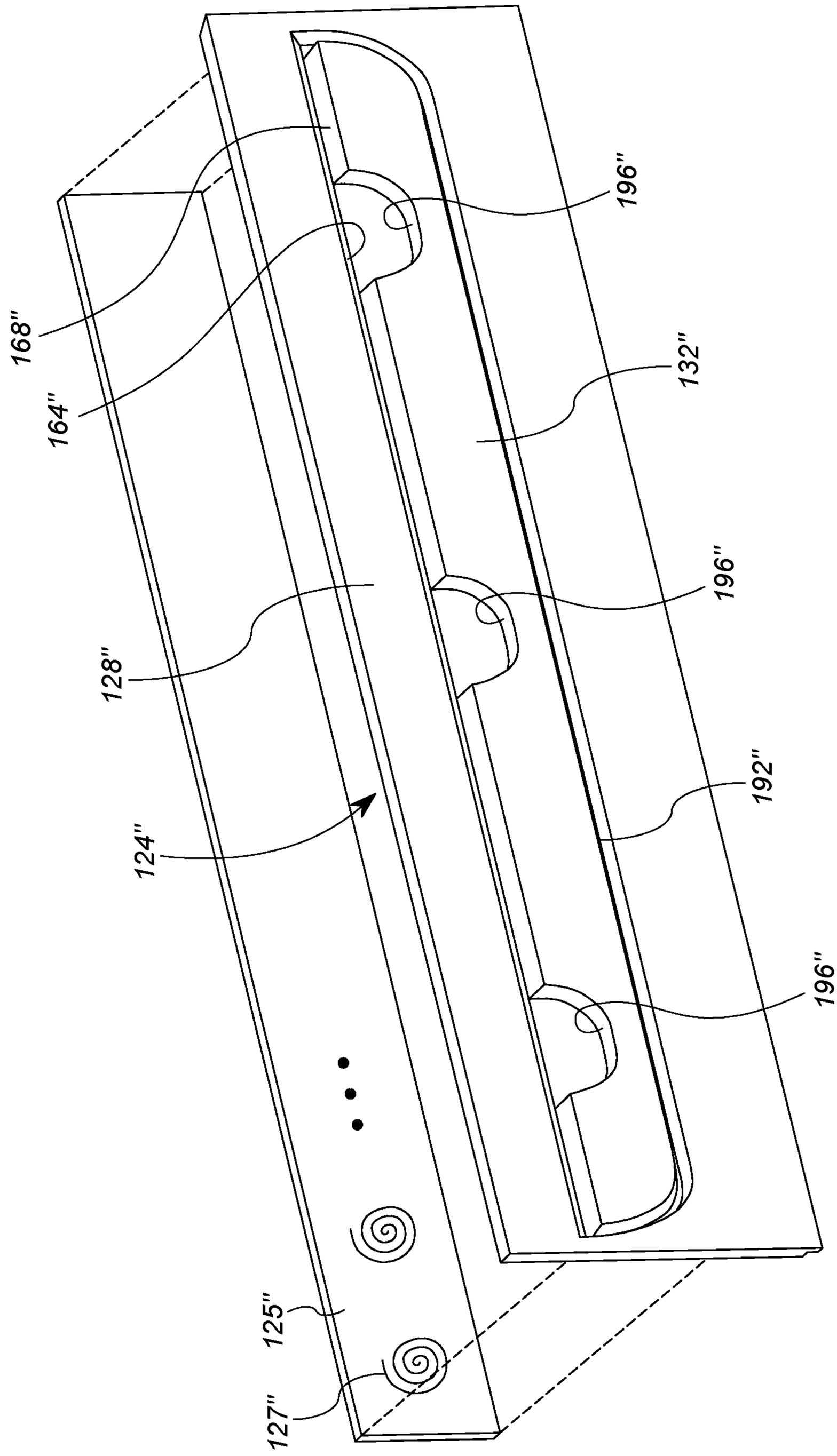

FIG. 6

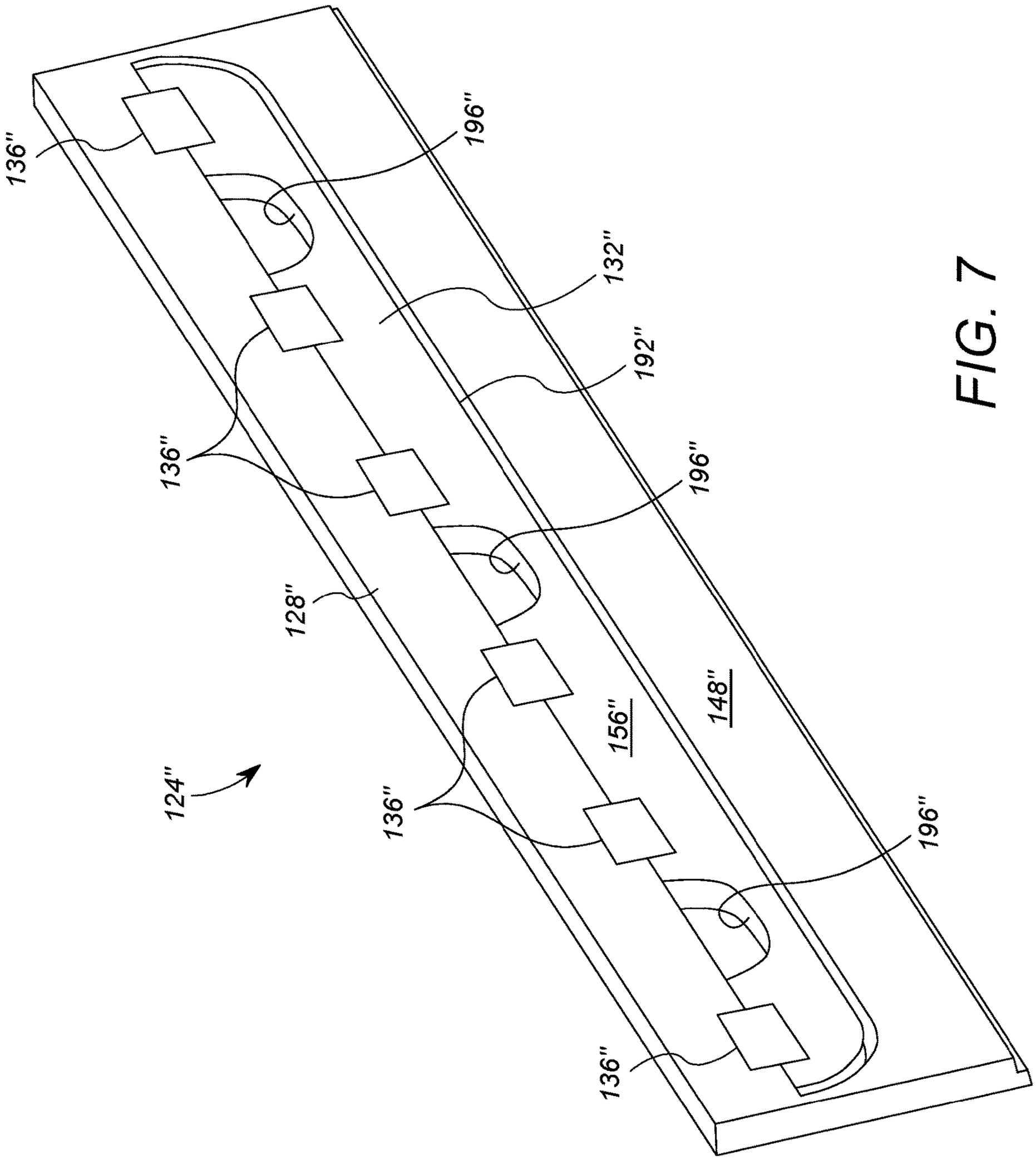

FIG. 7

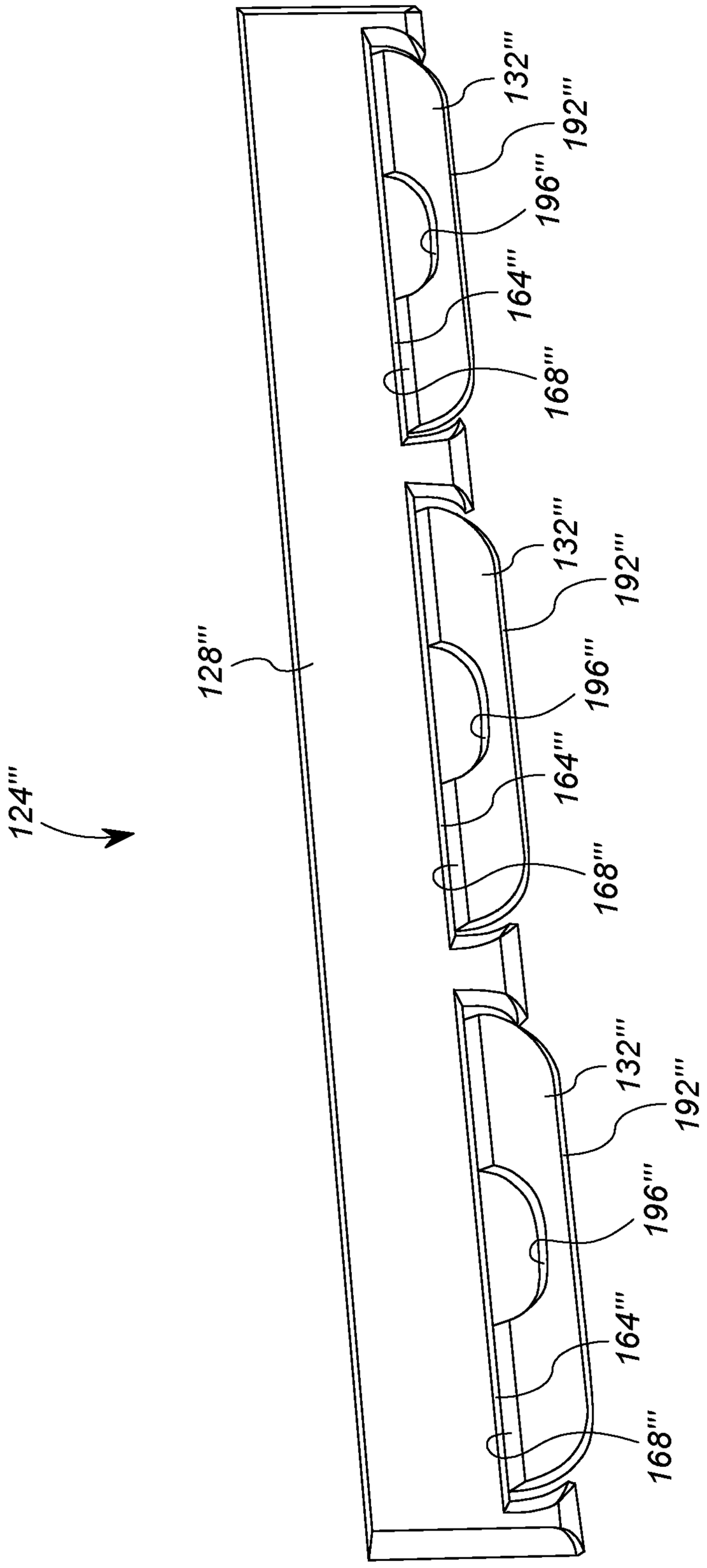
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FIG. 8

COMPACT HINGED CASKET HANDLE

BACKGROUND

Caskets are a standard part of many traditional memorial and funeral services and ceremonies. Over time, the range of materials and styles that are available for caskets has increased. Now more than ever, friends and families are able to choose a casket for their loved one that fulfills their aesthetic wishes, meets their budgetary limitations, and/or fits their functional needs. Another option that is increasingly available for caskets is a larger size. Larger sized caskets include a larger interior width than a standard casket to accommodate a greater variety of body shapes and sizes. A larger sized casket also enables accommodation of a larger sized person within the casket while maintaining a dignified and restful appearance. However, larger caskets are typically more expensive, due in part to additional materials costs, and also due in part to the fact that they are a non-standard size, and therefore a specialty item. It is desirable to provide a casket with a larger interior width than a standard casket that is also less expensive than a specialty sized casket and further also has a distinguished and respectable appearance.

Another issue with larger caskets is that they may not be compatible with other equipment and spaces used in memorial and funeral services and ceremonies. In particular, larger caskets may be too wide for equipment and spaces that were made to accommodate standard sized caskets. Handles for lifting and transporting the casket are typically formed on the outside walls of the casket. Accordingly, handles add further width to the casket, exacerbating the incompatibility issue of larger caskets. Put another way, handles take up some amount of the overall width of a casket. The farther the handles protrude from the outside walls of the casket, the more of the width of the casket they occupy, which leaves less width in the interior of the casket to accommodate the deceased. It is desirable to provide handles for a casket that maximize the width available in the interior of the casket.

SUMMARY

A casket has been developed including a compact swinging casket handle. The casket includes two side panel structures, two end panels, and a bottom panel. Each end panel is operably coupled to both of the side panel structures. The bottom panel is coupled to both of the side panel structures and both of the end panels such that the bottom panel, two side panel structures and two end panels form, at least in part, a casket container configured to receive adult human remains. Each side panel structure includes a fixed member and a movable member. The fixed member has a fixed member outward surface. Each movable member is coupled to one of the fixed members such that each movable member is rotatable relative to the fixed members between a first position and a second position. Each movable member also has a movable member outward surface. When each of the movable members is in the first position, the movable member outward surface is substantially coplanar with the fixed member outward surface of the fixed member to which the movable member is coupled. When each of the movable members is in the second position, the movable member outward surface is not substantially coplanar with the fixed member outward surface of the fixed member to which the movable member is coupled.

A method of forming a casket including a compact swinging casket handle has been developed. The method includes coupling two side panel structures to a bottom panel and coupling two end panels to the bottom panel to form, at least in part, a casket container configured to receive adult human remains. Each side panel structure includes a fixed member having a fixed member outward surface. The method also includes coupling at least one movable member to each of the fixed members such that each of the movable members is angularly rotatable relative to the fixed members between a first position and a second position. Each of the movable members is coupled to one of the fixed members such that, when each of the movable members is in the first position, a movable member outward surface is substantially coplanar with the fixed member outward surface of the fixed member to which the movable member is coupled. Each of the movable members is coupled to one of the fixed members such that, when each of the movable members is in the second position, the movable member outward surface is not substantially coplanar with the fixed member outward surface of the fixed member to which the movable member is coupled.

The above described features and advantages, as well as others, will become more readily apparent to those of ordinary skill in the art by reference to the following detailed description and accompanying drawings. While it would be desirable to provide a casket and method that provide one or more of these or other advantages, the teachings disclosed herein extend to those embodiments which fall within the scope of the appended claims, regardless of whether they accomplish one or more of the above-mentioned advantages.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

FIG. **1** depicts a front perspective view of one embodiment of a casket base having a compact swinging casket handle.

FIG. **2** depicts a top perspective view of the embodiment of the casket base shown in FIG. **1**.

FIG. **3** depicts a partial cross-sectional view of the embodiment of the casket base shown in FIG. **1**.

FIG. **4** depicts a front perspective view of a casket including the casket base shown in FIG. **1** and a lid.

FIG. **5** depicts a front perspective view of an alternative embodiment of a casket including a casket base and a lid.

FIG. **6** depicts a front perspective view of an alternative embodiment of a handle mechanism for use with the casket base shown in FIG. **1**.

FIG. **7** depicts a back perspective view of the handle mechanism shown in FIG. **6**.

FIG. **8** depicts a front perspective view of another alternative embodiment of a handle mechanism for use with the casket base shown in FIG. **1**.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

FIG. **4** shows a first exemplary embodiment of a casket **10** according to the invention. The casket **10** includes a casket base **100** and a lid **200**. The casket base **100** is generally shaped as an open-top box having a length and width configured to receive a deceased adult human body, not shown. The casket base **100** and lid **200** have a height configured to enclose the deceased adult human body.

With reference to FIGS. **1** and **2**, the casket base has two end panels **104**, **108** arranged opposite to one another, two inner side panels **112**, **116** arranged opposite to one another, and a bottom panel **120** (shown in FIG. **2**) coupled to each of the end panels **104**, **108** and each of the inner side panels **112**, **116**. The casket base **100** further includes two handle mechanisms **124**, one of which is fixedly coupled to each of

the inner side panels **112**, **116**. As described in further detail below, each handle mechanism **124** includes a fixed member **128**, a movable member **132**, and a hinge member **136** (shown in FIG. **3**). Each of the handle mechanisms **124** is configured such that the fixed member **128** is fixedly coupled to one of the inner side panels **112**, **116** and the movable member **132** is angularly rotatable relative to the fixed member **128** via the hinge member **136** to provide a compact swinging casket handle for gripping and manually transporting the casket base **100**. The movable members **132** are rotatable between a first position (see handle mechanism **124** on inner side panel **116** on the left in FIG. **1**) in which the movable member **132** is "resting" or "neutral," and a second position (see handle mechanism **124** on inner side panel **112** on the right in FIG. **1**) in which the movable member **132** is "active" or "angled."

In this embodiment, each fixed member **128** cooperates with the inner side panel **112**, **116** to which it is coupled to form a corresponding, reinforced side panel structure **113**, **117**. Each fixed member **128** in this embodiment is a rigid unitary structure (e.g. a continuous plank or other structure of a single composition), which may be constructed of wood, a wood product, or other materials, and extends between and to each of the end panels **104**, **108**, thus providing structural reinforcement. To this end, each fixed member **128** is rigidly coupled to each of the end panels **104**, **108**. In some embodiments, as will be discussed below, the fixed member **128** may constitute the bulk of the side panel structure, wherein the inner side panels **112**, **116** do not form full sides of the casket **100**, and may even be replaced by plastic liner or elongate plate in some cases.

Referring again to the exemplary embodiment of FIG. **1**, the handle mechanisms **124** are configured to protrude as little as possible from the inner side panels **112**, **116** of the casket base **100**. Accordingly, these low profile handle mechanisms **124** take up little of an overall width of the casket base **100**. In other words, the handle mechanisms **124** enable more of the width of a casket base **100** to be available for accommodating the deceased. This is advantageous for both standard and larger sized caskets. For standard sized caskets, the availability of more of the interior width to accommodate the deceased (i.e. deceased adult human) decreases the likelihood of needing a larger sized casket. For larger sized caskets, the additional interior width provides further space for accommodation and presentation of the deceased.

To form the casket base **100**, each of the end panels **104**, **108** is fixedly coupled to each of the inner side panels **112**, **116** and to the bottom panel **120** such that each of the end panels **104**, **108** is arranged parallel to one another, perpendicular to the inner side panels **112**, **116**, and perpendicular to the bottom panel **120**. Similarly, each of the inner side panels **112**, **116** is fixedly coupled to each of the end panels **104**, **108** and to the bottom panel **120** such that each of the inner side panels **112**, **116** is arranged parallel to one another, perpendicular to the end panels **104**, **108**, and perpendicular to the bottom panel **120**. The end panels **104**, **108** can be fixedly coupled to the inner side panels **112**, **116** and to the bottom panel **120** by an adhesive or by a rigid fixation body, such as a screw or nail, or by another known mechanism for irremovably coupling two rigid bodies to one another. Similarly, the inner side panels **112**, **116** can be fixedly coupled to the end panels **104**, **108** and to the bottom panel **120** by an adhesive or by a rigid fixation body, such as a screw or nail, or by another known mechanism for irremovably coupling two rigid bodies to one another.

Each of the end panels **104**, **108** has an end panel inward surface **106** facing toward the opposite end panel **104**, **108**. Similarly, each of the inner side panels **112**, **116** has a side panel inward surface **114** facing toward the opposite inner side panel **112**, **116**. Additionally, the bottom panel **120** has a bottom panel inward surface **122** (shown in FIG. **2**) facing toward the area that is between the end panels **104**, **108** and the inner side panels **112**, **116**. Each of the end panels **104**, **108** also has an end panel outward surface **110** facing away from the opposite end panel **104**, **108**. Similarly, each of the inner side panels **112**, **116** has a side panel outward surface **118** facing away from the opposite inner side panel **112**, **116**. Accordingly, the end panel inward surface **106** of each of the end panels **104**, **108** is diametrically opposite the end panel outward surface **110** of the same end panel **104**, **108**. Similarly, the side panel inward surface **114** of each of the inner side panels **112**, **116** is diametrically opposite the side panel outward surface **118** of the same inner side panel **112**, **116**.

Each of the end panels **104**, **108**, the inner side panels **112**, **116**, and the bottom panel **120** is made of a strong, but lightweight material, such as, for example, wood or corrugated paper. An advantage of using materials such as wood and corrugated cardboard for the end panels **104**, **108**, inner side panels **112**, **116**, and bottom panel **120** is that the materials are inexpensive and combustible. This facilitates making the casket base **100** as inexpensive as possible and enables the casket base **100** to be cremated, if desired.

As shown in FIG. **3**, each of the handle mechanisms **124** is coupled to the side panel outward surface **118** of one of the inner side panels **112**, **116**. More specifically, the fixed member **128** of each of the handle mechanisms **124** includes a fixed member casket facing (inward) surface **148**, which is directly and fixedly coupled to the side panel outward surface **118** of one of the inner side panels **112**, **116**. When the fixed member **128** is coupled to the inner side panel **112** or **116**, the fixed member **128** is arranged approximately parallel to the inner side panels **112**, **116**. Each of the fixed members **128** also includes a fixed member outward surface **152**, which is diametrically opposite the fixed member casket facing surface **148**. Similarly, the movable member **132** of each of the handle mechanisms **124** includes a movable member casket facing (inward) surface **156**, which is configured to face toward the side panel outward surface **118** of one of the inner side panels **112**, **116** when the movable member is in the first position (as shown on inner side panel **116** on the left in FIG. **3**). Each of the movable members **132** also includes a movable member outward surface **160**, which is diametrically opposite the movable member casket facing surface **156**.

In this embodiment, the fixed members **128** and movable members **132** of the handle mechanisms **124** are made of a strong, rigid material, such as, for example, wood or a wood-like composite product. Each fixed member **128** and its corresponding movable member **132** can be formed from the same piece of wood (or similar material), not shown. The piece of wood, or elongate blanks, is cut to form the shapes of the fixed member **128** and movable member described further below.

The casket facing surface **148** of the fixed member **128** of each of the handle mechanisms **124** is hingedly coupled to the casket facing surface **156** of the movable member **132** via at least one hinge member **136**. As shown in FIG. **3**, at least one hinge member **136** is coupled to a portion of the casket facing surface **148** of the fixed member **128** and to a portion of the casket facing surface **156** of the movable member **132** to form the hinge connection between the fixed

member **128** and the movable member **132**. In particular, the at least one hinge member **136** is directly coupled to the casket facing surface **148** of the fixed member **128** and is directly coupled to the casket facing surface **156** of the movable member **132**. Thus, the at least one hinge member **136** is at least partially interposed between the casket facing surface **148** of the fixed member **128** and the inner side panel outward surface **118** of the inner side panel **112**, **116** to which the handle mechanism **124** is coupled. Similarly, the at least one hinge member **136** is also at least partially interposed between the casket facing surface **156** of the movable member **132** and the inner side panel outward surface **118**.

The arrangement of the at least one hinge member **136** between the handle mechanism **124** and the inner side panel **112**, **116** enables the movable member **132** to rotate outwardly relative to the fixed member **128**, away from the inner side panel outward surface **118**. This facilitates gripping the movable member **132** to lift and transport the casket base **100**. Furthermore, the arrangement of the at least one hinge member **136** between the handle mechanism **124** and the inner side panel **112**, **116** enables a smooth, continuous outward appearance of the casket base **100** when the handle mechanisms **124** are not in use. This is desirable for providing a distinguished and respectable aesthetic for the casket base **100**. Moreover, this provides a sleek and modern aesthetic, which many find to be desirable.

The hinge members **136** are flexible members made of, for example, a woven fabric material. The hinge members **136** are also formed of a durable and strong material, for example, a nylon material. The material must be strong enough to support the weight of the deceased during lifting and transporting the deceased inside the casket base **100**. However, the material should be lightweight so as not to add unnecessary weight to the casket base **100**. Moreover, the material and dimensions of the hinge members must be capable of distributing the load along the fixed members **128** and movable members **132** to avoid failure of the material at a particular load bearing location during lifting and transporting the deceased inside the casket base **100**. To this end, multiple woven fabric hinge members having a width of more than one inch may be employed (See analogous hinge members **136"** of FIG. **7**).

It will be appreciated that at least some advantages of this embodiment may be achieved also with non-woven fabric hinge members.

The hinge members **136** are fixedly coupled to the casket facing surface **148** of the fixed member **128** and the casket facing surface **156** of the movable member **132** by, for example, an adhesive or by rigid fixation bodies, such as rivets or brads, or by another known mechanism for irremovably coupling a flexible body to a rigid body. The mechanism of fixation of the hinge members **136** to the fixed member **128** and the movable member **132** is as low profile as possible to avoid adding more width to the casket base **100**.

Each handle mechanism **124** of the casket base **100** is independently operable. In other words, the movable members **132** of the two handle mechanisms **124** can be moved independently of one another between the first position and the second position. The first position of the handle mechanisms **124** is illustrated on the side wall **116** on the left side of FIG. **3**. As shown, the handle mechanisms **124** are arranged and configured such that when the movable member **132** is in the first position, the casket facing surface **156** of that movable member **132** is approximately coplanar with the casket facing surface **148** of the fixed member **128** of the same handle mechanism **124**.

The term "coplanar," as used herein, means arranged in substantially the same plane. As shown on the left side of FIG. **3**, the casket facing surface **156** of the movable member **132** is made up of points arranged in a geometric plane that is perpendicular to the page and is arranged vertically in the arrangement of the casket base **100** shown in FIG. **3**. The casket facing surface **148** of the fixed member **128** is also made up of points arranged in a geometric plane that is perpendicular to the page and is arranged vertically in the arrangement of the casket base **100** shown in FIG. **3**. When the movable member **132** is arranged in the first position, the points that make up the casket facing surface **156** of the movable member **132** and the points that make up the casket facing surface **148** of the fixed member **128** are arranged in the same geometric plane. Thus, the casket facing surface **156** of the movable member **132** and the casket facing surface **148** of the fixed member **128** are coplanar. The term "approximately," or "substantially" as used herein, accounts for discrepancies resulting from tolerances in manufacturing processes and material properties.

The second position of the handle mechanisms **124** is illustrated on the side wall **112** on the right side of FIG. **3**. As shown, the handle mechanisms **124** are arranged and configured such that when the movable member **132** is in the second position, the casket facing surface **156** of that movable member **132** is not approximately coplanar with the casket facing surface **148** of the fixed member **128** of the same handle mechanism **124**. In other words, when the movable member **132** is in the second position, the points that make up the casket facing surface **156** of the movable member **132** are arranged in a different geometric plane than the points that make up the casket facing surface **148** of the fixed member **128**. In particular, the geometric plane including the points that make up the casket facing surface **156** of the movable member **132** are arranged in a geometric plane that is perpendicular to the page and is arranged at an angle of approximately 34 degrees from vertical. In contrast, the geometric plane including the points that make up the casket facing surface **148** of the fixed member **128** are arranged in a geometric plane that is perpendicular to the page and is arranged vertically in the arrangement of the casket base **100** shown in FIG. **3**.

Additionally, as shown in FIG. **3**, when the movable member **132** is in the first position, the outward surface **160** of that movable member **132** is approximately coplanar with the outward surface **152** of the fixed member **128** to which that movable member **132** is attached. When the movable member **132** is in the second position, the outward surface **160** of that movable member **132** is not approximately coplanar with the outward surface **152** of the fixed member **128** to which that movable member **132** is attached.

As explained in further detail below, each of the fixed members **128** includes a fixed member stop surface **164** configured to limit the angular rotation of the movable member **132** coupled to that fixed member **128**. Additionally, each of the movable members **132** includes a movable member stop surface **168** configured to directly contact and cooperate with the fixed member stop surface **164** to limit the angular rotation of the movable member **132** relative to that fixed member **128**, thereby defining the second position. To this end, the stop surfaces **164** and **168** may suitably be beveled edges of, respectively, the fixed members **128** and the movable members **132**. However, it will be appreciated that in other embodiments, only one of the stop surfaces **164**, **168** need be a beveled or angled edge surface.

With regard to the embodiment of FIGS. **1** and **2**, the fixed member stop surface **164** and the movable member stop surface **168** are thus configured delimit the angle of the movable member **132** relative to the fixed member **128** when the movable member **132** is in the second position. For example, the fixed member stop surface **164** and the movable member stop surface **168** are configured to delimit the angle of the movable member **132** relative to the fixed member **128** to an angle of 34 degrees. Alternatively, the fixed member stop surface **164** and the movable member stop surface **168** can delimit the angle of the movable member **132** relative to the fixed member **128** to an angle other than 34 degrees that is large enough to facilitate comfortably gripping the movable member **132** of the handle mechanism **124** and also positions the weight bearing locus of the handle mechanisms **124** in a mechanically stable and robust location.

With specific reference to the beveled stop surfaces, the fixed member stop surface **164** extends between the casket facing surface **148** and the outward surface **152** of the fixed member **128**. When the fixed member **128** is coupled to the outward surface **118** of one of the inner side panels **112**, **116**, the fixed member stop surface **164** is arranged such that it faces in a substantially downwardly direction, generally toward the bottom panel **120**. The fixed member stop surface **164** is not arranged perpendicularly to the casket facing surface **148** or the outward surface **152** of the fixed member **128**. Instead, it is angled upwardly from the casket facing surface **148** to the outward surface **152**. In other words, the fixed member stop surface **164** is angled such that it is nearer to the bottom panel **120** where it meets the casket facing surface **148** and is farther from the bottom panel **120** where it meets the outward surface **152** of the fixed member **128**. It will be appreciated that in an alternative embodiment, the fixed member stop surface **164** may only extend partially inward from the outer surface **152**.

Similarly, the movable member stop surface **168** extends between the casket facing surface **156** and the outward surface **160** of the movable member **132**. When the movable member **132** is coupled to the outward surface **118** of one of the inner side panels **112**, **116** via the corresponding fixed member **128** and is in the first position, the movable member stop surface **168** is arranged such that it faces in a substantially upwardly direction, generally toward the fixed member stop surface **164** of the corresponding fixed member **128**. In other words, like the fixed member stop surface **164**, the movable member stop surface **168** is not arranged perpendicularly to the casket facing surface **156** or the outward surface **160** of the movable member **132**. Instead, the movable member stop surface **168** is angled downwardly from the casket facing surface **156** to the outward surface **160**. In other words, the movable member stop surface **168** is angled such that, when the movable member **132** is in the first position, the surface **168** is farther from the bottom panel **120** where it meets the casket facing surface **156** and is nearer to the bottom panel **120** where it meets the outward surface **160** of the movable member **132**. It will be appreciated that in an alternative embodiment, the movable member stop surface **168** may only extend partially inward from the outward surface **160**.

However, when the movable member **132** is moved out of the first position, the movable member stop surface **168** rotates angularly along with the movable member **132**. Accordingly, the orientation of the movable member stop surface **168** varies as the movable member **132** rotates between the first position and the second position. In the embodiment shown in FIG. **3**, the angle of the fixed member stop surface **164** and the angle of the movable member stop surface **168** are configured such that, when the movable member stop surface **168** is in contact with the fixed members stop surface **164**, the movable member stop surface **168** is nearer to the bottom panel **120** where it meets the casket facing surface **156** and is farther from the bottom panel **120** where it meets the outward surface **160** of the movable member **132**.

In the embodiment shown, each of the handle mechanisms **124** extends along an entire length of the inner side panel **112**, **116** from the end panel **104** to the end panel **108**. This arrangement provides a continuous and cohesive aesthetic and a uniform dimension along the entire length of the casket base **100**. However, in alternative embodiments, each of the handle mechanisms **124** can extend over less than the entire length of the inner side panel **112**, **116** and still provide a stable and robust mechanism for carrying the casket base **100**.

Additionally, as shown in the embodiment of FIGS. **1** and **2**, the casket base **100** further includes two end cover panels **172**. Each end cover panel **172** includes a casket facing surface **174** which is directly coupled to the outward surface **110** of a corresponding one of the end panels **104**, **108**. Each of the end cover panels **172** extends over an entire width of the outward surface **110** of the end panel **104**, **108** from the inner side panel **112** to the inner side panel **116**. The end cover panels **172** also extend from the handle mechanism **124** coupled to the inner side panel **112** to the handle mechanism **124** coupled to the inner side panel **116**. Thus, the end cover panels **172** are configured and arranged to provide a continuous and cohesive aesthetic with the handle mechanisms **124** that extends around the entire perimeter of the outward surfaces **110**, **118** of the end panels **104**, **108** and the inner side panels **112**, **116** of the casket base **100**. In alternative embodiments, the casket base **100** may not include end cover panels **172** or may include end cover panels **172** having a different shape or arrangement than that shown in the embodiment of FIGS. **1** and **2**.

The cover panels **172** cooperate with the end panels **104**, **108** to form reinforced end panel structures, similar to the side panel structures **113**, **117**. The cover panels **172** provide reinforcement to the end panels **104**, **108**. In some embodiments, the cover panels **172** connect to the fixed members **128** form a stiff, skeletal structure for the casket base **100**.

In the embodiment of the casket base **100** shown in FIGS. **1** and **2**, each of the fixed members **128** of the handle mechanisms **124** has a fixed member top surface **176** that is arranged approximately parallel to the bottom panel inward surface **122** and farther from the bottom panel inward surface **122** than is a inner side panel top surface **180** of the inner side panel **112**, **116** to which the fixed member **128** is attached. Accordingly, each of the fixed members **128** extends farther from the bottom panel **120** than does the corresponding inner side panel **112**, **116**. Similarly, each of the end cover panels **172** has a cover panel top surface **184** that is arranged approximately parallel to the bottom panel inward surface **122** and farther from the bottom panel inward surface **122** than is an end panel top surface **188** of the end panel **104**, **108** to which the end cover panel **172** is attached. Accordingly, each of the end cover panels **172** extends farther from the bottom panel **120** than does the corresponding end panel **104**, **108**. The fixed member top surfaces **176** are arranged at the same distance from the bottom panel **120** as the end panel top surfaces **188**. Accordingly, the fixed member top surfaces **176** and the end panel top surfaces **188** form a continuous top surface around the perimeter of the casket base **100**.

As discussed above, the casket **10** of FIG. **4** includes the casket base **100** as well as the lid **200**. The lid **200** in this embodiment is formed in two separate parts **204**, **208**. Part **208** of the lid **200** is shown in phantom with dashed lines in FIG. **4**. Each part **204**, **208** of the lid **200** includes an end piece **212**, two side pieces **216**, **220**, and a top piece **224**. When both of the lid parts **204**, **208** are arranged on the casket base **100**, the top pieces **224** of the lid parts **204**, **208** cooperate to form a single continuous panel arranged approximately parallel to and spaced apart from the bottom panel **120** of the casket base **100**. Additionally, the side pieces **216** of the lid parts **204**, **208** cooperate to form a single continuous inner side panel extending from the casket base **100** to the top pieces **224**, and the side pieces **220** of the lid parts **204**, **208** cooperate to form a single continuous inner side panel extending from the casket base **100** to the top pieces **224**.

Each of the side pieces **216**, **220** and the end piece **212** of both of the lid parts **204**, **208** includes a lip **228** configured to rest on the casket base **100**. More specifically, at the side pieces **216**, **220**, the lip **228** of each of the lid parts **204**, **208** is configured to rest on portions of both of the fixed member top surfaces **176**, and at the end pieces **212**, the lip **228** of each of the end parts **204**, **208** is configured to rest on the cover panel top surfaces **184** of one of the end cover panels **172**.

Additionally, each of the side pieces **216**, **220** and the end piece **212** of both of the lid parts **204**, **208** further includes a brace **232** configured to rest inside the casket base **100**. More specifically, at the side pieces **216**, **220**, the brace **232** rests against the casket facing surfaces **148** of the fixed members **128**, and at the end pieces **212**, the brace **232** rests against the casket facing surfaces **174** (shown in FIGS. **1** and **2**) of the end cover panels **172**. Together, the lips **228** and the braces **232** of the lid parts **204**, **208** secure the lid **200** in place on the casket base **100** to form the casket **10**.

In alternative embodiments, the casket **100** may not include end cover panels **172**. In such embodiments, the lid parts **204**, **208** cooperate with the end panels **104**, **108** instead of the end cover panels **172** to secure the lid **200** in place on the casket base **100** to form the casket **10**. In further alternative embodiments, the end cover panels **172** and the fixed members **128** may not extend farther from the bottom panel **120** of the casket base **100** than the end panels **104**, **108** and inner side panels **112**, **116**. Instead, the end cover panels **172** and fixed members **128** may be coextensive with the end panels **104**, **108** and the inner side panels **112**, **116**. In such embodiments, the braces **232** of the lid parts **204**, **208** rest against the inward surfaces **106** (shown in FIGS. **1** and **2**) of the end panels **104**, **108** and the inward surfaces **114** of the inner side panels **112**, **116** instead of the casket facing surfaces **148** of the fixed members **128** and the casket facing surfaces **174** of the end cover panels **172**. In further alternative embodiments, the lid **200** can comprise only one part instead of two separate lid parts **204**, **208**. In such embodiments, the lid **200** cooperates with both fixed members **128** and both end cover panels **172** to be secured in place on the casket base **100** to form the casket **10**.

FIG. **5** depicts an alternative embodiment of a casket **10'** including a casket base **100'** and a lid **200'**. Only one lid part **204'** is shown in FIG. **5**. The casket **10'** is substantially similar in structure and function to the casket **10** shown in FIG. **4** and described above. More specifically, the lid **200'** is the same as the lid **200** shown in FIG. **4** and described above, and the casket base **100'** is similar to the casket base **100**. However, as described in further detail below, the casket base **100'** differs from the casket base **100** in that the handle mechanisms **124'** are different from the handle mechanisms **124** and the end cover panels **172'** differ from the end cover panels **172**.

In FIG. **5**, both of the movable members **132'** are shown in the first position. However, each of the movable members **132'** is configured and arranged to move between the first position and the second position as described above with respect to movable members **132**. Each of the movable members **132'** also includes a movable member bottom surface **192'** and at least one notch **196'** formed in the movable member bottom surface **192'** Like the movable member stop surface **168'**, the movable member bottom surface **192'** extends between the movable member casket facing surface **156'** (not shown in FIG. **5**) and the movable member outward surface **160'**. However, the movable member bottom surface **192'** is arranged at the opposite end of the movable member **132'** from the movable member stop surface **168'**. When each of the movable members **132'** is in the first position, as shown in FIG. **5**, the movable member bottom surface **192'** is approximately parallel to and coplanar with an outward surface (not shown) of the bottom panel **120'** (not shown in FIG. **5**). The outward surface of the bottom panel **120'** is diametrically opposed to the bottom panel inward surface **122'** (not shown in FIG. **5**).

Each of the notches **196'** is formed in the movable member bottom surface **192'** extending into the movable member **132'** in the direction of the movable member stop surface **168'**. Each of the notches **196'** is configured to provide a hand hold where users can comfortably and securely grip the movable member **132'** to lift and transport the casket **10'**. More specifically, when a user grasps one of the notches **196'**, the movable member **132'** freely rotates relative to the fixed member **128'** until the movable member stop surface **168'** contacts the fixed member stop surface **164'** in the second position. The angular rotation of the movable member **132'** outwardly away from the inner side panel outward surface **118'** enables the user's fingers to fit between the movable member **132'** and the inner side panel **112'**, **116'** to comfortably and securely grip the movable member **132'** of the handle mechanism **124'** to lift and transport the casket **10'**. When the user releases the notch **196'**, the movable member **132'** freely rotates back to the first position such that the movable member **132'** does not project any farther from the inner side panel **112'**, **116'** than does the fixed member **128'** of the same handle mechanism **124'**.

As described above, in the embodiment of the casket **10'** shown in FIG. **5**, the bottom surface **192'** of each of the movable members **132'** is approximately coplanar with the bottom surface of the bottom panel **120'**. Accordingly, to provide aesthetic continuity, each of the end cover panels **172'** also includes an end cover panel bottom surface **198'**, which is approximately parallel to and coplanar with the bottom surface of the bottom panel **120'**. Accordingly, each end cover panel bottom surface **198'** is also approximately parallel to and coplanar with the movable member bottom surface **192'** of each of the movable members **132'** when the movable member **132'** is in the first position.

FIGS. **6** and **7** depict an alternative embodiment of a handle mechanism **124"** that is similar in structure and function to each of the handle mechanisms **124** shown and described with reference to FIGS. **1-4** and each of the handle mechanisms **124'** shown and described with reference to FIG. **5**. However, as described in further detail below, the handle mechanism **124"** differs from the handle mechanisms **124** and **124'** in that the handle mechanism **124"** includes a fixed member **128"** that is arranged both above and below the movable member **132"** and that each movable member

132" includes a notch 196" formed in the movable member stop surface 168". As with the embodiments described above, the movable member 132" and the fixed member 128" may be cut from a single blank.

In FIGS. 6 and 7, the movable member 132" of the handle mechanism 124" is shown in the first position. However, the movable member 132" is configured and arranged to move between the first position and the second position in the manner described above with respect to movable members 132. As shown in FIG. 7, to accommodate the notches 196" formed in the movable member top surface 168", the handle mechanism 124" includes a plurality of hinge members 136" that are coupled to the fixed member casket facing surface 148" and the movable member casket facing surface 156" and are spaced along the movable member top surface 168". The plurality of hinge members 136" enable the movable member 132" to rotate relative to the fixed member 128" and provide a sturdy and robust attachment between the fixed member 128 "and the movable member 132".

The notches 196" are formed in the movable member stop surface 168", and extend in the direction of the movable member bottom surface 192". Each of the notches 196" is configured to provide a hand hold where a user can comfortably and securely grip the movable member 132" to lift and transport a casket base, such as casket base 100 (shown in FIG. 1), when the handle mechanism 124" is coupled to the casket base 100. When the handle mechanism 124" is coupled to the casket base 100, the movable member 132" is free to rotate away from the inner side panel outward surface 118 of the inner side panel 112, 116 of the casket base 100.

Accordingly, to grasp the movable member 132", the user reaches the fingers through the notch 196" and between the movable member casket facing surface 156" (shown in FIG. 7) and the inner side panel outward surface 118. This action rotates the movable member bottom surface 192" outwardly and separates the movable member bottom surface 192" from the fixed member outward surface 152" (shown in FIG. 6). Accordingly, the user is then able to wrap the thumb around the movable member bottom surface 192" such that both the fingers and the thumb grasp the movable member casket facing surface 156" while the palm is arranged on the movable member outward surface 160" (shown in FIG. 6).

When a user grasps one of the movable members 132" by reaching the fingers through the notch 196" and wrapping the thumb around the movable member bottom surface 192", the movable member 132" freely rotates relative to the fixed member 128" until the movable member stop surface 168" contacts the fixed member stop surface 164" (shown in FIG. 6) in the second position. It will be appreciated that either or both of the stop surfaces 164" and 168" may have a beveled edge analogous to the stop surfaces 164, 168 of FIG. 3.

When the user releases the movable member 132", the movable member 132" freely rotates back to the first position such that the movable member 132" does not project any farther from the inner side panel 112, 116 than does the fixed member 128" of the same handle mechanism 124".

FIG. 8 depicts an alternative embodiment of a handle mechanism 124"' that is similar in structure and function to each of the handle mechanisms 124 shown and described with reference to FIGS. 1-4, each of the handle mechanisms 124' shown and described with reference to FIG. 5, and handle mechanism 124" shown and described with reference to FIGS. 6 and 7. However, as described in further detail below, the handle mechanism 124"' differs from the handle mechanisms 124, 124', and 124" in that the handle mechanism 124"' includes a plurality of independently movable members 132"' rotatably coupled to the fixed member 128"' and that each movable member 132"' includes a notch 196"' formed in the movable member stop surface 168"'.

In FIG. 8, each of the movable members 132"' of the handle mechanism 124"' is shown in the first position. However, each of the movable members 132"' is independently configured and arranged to move between the first position and the second position in the manner described above with respect to movable members 132. Accordingly, each of the movable members 132"' is independently coupled to the fixed member 128"' by corresponding hinge members. (The hinge members of the handle mechanism 124"' are not shown in FIG. 8, but are substantially similar to hinge members 136" shown in FIG. 7.)

Each movable member 132"' also includes a movable member bottom surface 192"' and a notch 196". Each notch 196"' is formed in one of the movable member stop surfaces 168"' in the direction of the movable member bottom surface 192". Each of the notches 196"' is configured to provide a hand hold where a user can comfortably and securely grip the movable member 132"' by reaching the fingers through the notch 196"' and wrapping the thumb around the movable member bottom surface 192"'. When a user grasps one of the movable members 132"' by reaching the fingers through the notch 196"' and wrapping the thumb around the movable member bottom surface 192"', the movable member 132"' freely rotates relative to the fixed member 128"' until the movable member stop surface 168"' contacts the fixed member stop surface 164"' in the second position.

When the handle mechanism 124"' is coupled to a casket base, such as casket base 100 (shown in FIG. 1), the angular rotation of the movable member 132"' outwardly away from the inner side panel outward surface 118 enables the user's fingers and thumb to fit between the movable member 132"' and the inner side panel 112, 116 to comfortably and securely grip the movable member 132"' of the handle mechanism 124"' to lift and transport the casket base 100. When the user releases the movable member 132"', the movable member 132"' freely rotates back to the first position such that the movable member 132"' does not project any farther from the inner side panel 112, 116 than does the fixed member 128"' of the same handle mechanism 124"'.

In at least one embodiment, the handle mechanism 124"' can be fixedly coupled to a casket base 100 such that the movable member bottom surfaces 192"' are approximately parallel to and coplanar with the bottom panel bottom surface (not shown) when each of the movable members 132"' is in the first position. In alternative embodiments, the handle mechanism 124"' can be fixedly coupled to a casket base 100 such that the movable member bottom surfaces 192"' are approximately parallel to, but not coplanar with, the bottom panel bottom surface when each of the movable members 132"' is in the first position.

In the embodiments of FIGS. 6-8, similar to the embodiment of FIGS. 1 and 2, the fixed members 128" and 128"' can form essentially the entire side panel structure. Instead of as inner side panel 112, 116, as shown in FIG. 1, material (i.e. a sheet or strip of plastic, wood, paper, etc.) may be employed that merely covers the openings in the fixed members 128" and 128"', including areas nominally covered by the movable members 132" and 132"' in the first position. For example, FIG. 6 shows an exemplary strip 125" that may be placed behind the fixed member 128" such that it covers the opening in the fixed member 128" wherein the movable member 132" is located. As shown in FIG. 6, the strip 125" may have aesthetic decorations 127", which may be stan-

dardized, or selected from a plurality of available designs. The strip **125"** is shown separated from the fixed member **128"** for clarity of exposition.

In an embodiment where the strip **125"** is customizable, the strip **125"** is configured for easy assembly at the funerary establishment. For example, the strip **125"** may contain adhesive on that affixes to the inward facing surface of the fixed member **128"** (or fixed member **128'"**. Alternatively, the strip **125"** may be affixed to the same surface using other means, such as hook and loop fasteners or staples.

Caskets, such as casket **10** and casket **10'**, and similar caskets including casket bases, such as casket base **100** and casket base **100'**, can be made in the following manner. End panels **104**, **108** are directly coupled to a bottom panel **120** such that the end panels **104**, **108** are parallel to one another and perpendicular to the bottom panel **120**. Similarly, inner side panels **112**, **116** are directly coupled to the bottom panel **120** such that the inner side panels **112**, **116** are parallel to one another and perpendicular to the bottom panel **120**. Additionally, inner side panels **112**, **116** are directly coupled to the end panels **104**, **108** such that the inner side panels **112**, **116** are perpendicular to the end panels **104**, **108**.

Handle mechanisms **124** are coupled to each of the inner side panels **112**, **116**. In particular, one handle mechanism **124** is coupled to each inner side panel **112**, **116**. Each handle mechanism **124** includes a fixed member **128**, which is directly coupled to the inner side panel **112**, **116**. More specifically, the fixed member **128** is coupled to the inner side panel **112**, **116** such that a casket facing surface **148** of the fixed member **128** is directly coupled to an outward surface **118** of the inner side panel **112**, **116**. The fixed member **128** is coupled to the inner side panel **112**, **116** such that the fixed member **128** is approximately parallel to the inner side panel **112**, **116**.

A movable member **132** of each handle mechanism **124** is coupled to the fixed member **128** via a hinge member **136** such that the movable member **132** is angularly rotatable relative to the fixed member **128** between a first position and a second position. When the movable member **132** is in the first position, a casket facing surface **156** of the movable member **132** is approximately coplanar with the casket facing surface **148** of the fixed member **128**. Furthermore, when the movable member **132** is in the first position, an outward surface **160** of the movable member **132**, which is diametrically opposed to the casket facing surface **156** of the movable member **132**, is approximately coplanar with an outward surface **152** of the fixed member **128**, which is diametrically opposed to the casket facing surface **148** of the fixed member **128**.

When the movable member **132** is in the second position, the casket facing surface **156** of the movable member **132** is not approximately coplanar with the casket facing surface **148** of the fixed member **128**. Furthermore, when the movable member **132** is in the second position, the outward surface **160** of the movable member **132** is not approximately coplanar with the outward surface **152** of the fixed member **128**.

The movable member **132** is coupled to the fixed member **128** by directly coupling the hinge member **136** to the casket facing surface **148** of the fixed member **128** and directly coupling the hinge member **136** to the casket facing surface **156** of the movable member **132**. Furthermore, the hinge member **136** is directly coupled to the fixed member **128** and to the movable member **132** such that the hinge member is at least partially interposed between the inner side panel **112**, **116** and the fixed member **128**.

The fixed member **128** is coupled to the inner side panel **112**, **116** such that a fixed member stop surface **164** is arranged to limit angular rotation of the movable member **132**. The fixed member **128** may further be coupled to the end panels **104**, **108** and/or the end cover panels **172**. Furthermore, the movable member **132** is coupled to the fixed member **128** such that a movable member stop surface **168** is arranged to directly contact the fixed member stop surface **164** when the movable member **132** is in the second position.

The foregoing description of one or more embodiments of the casket, casket base, and method of forming a casket has been presented herein by way of example only and not limitation. It will be recognized that there are advantages to certain individual features and functions described herein that may be obtained without incorporating other features and functions described herein. Moreover, it will be recognized that various alternatives, modifications, variations, or improvements of the above-disclosed embodiments and other features and functions, or alternatives thereof, may be desirably combined into many other different embodiments, systems, or applications. Presently unforeseen or unanticipated alternatives, modifications, variations, or improvements therein may be subsequently made by those skilled in the art which are also intended to be encompassed by the appended claims. Therefore, the spirit and scope of any appended claims should not be limited to the description of the embodiments contained herein.

What is claimed is:

1. A casket, comprising:

two side panel structures and two end panels, each end panel operably coupled to both of the side panel structures;

a bottom panel coupled to both of the side panel structures and both of the end panels such that the bottom panel, the two side panel structures and the two end panels form, at least in part, a casket container configured to receive adult human remains;

wherein each side panel structure includes a fixed member, the fixed member having a fixed member outward surface, and a movable member, each movable member coupled to one of the fixed members such that each movable member is rotatable relative to corresponding one of the fixed members between a first position and a second position, each movable member having a movable member outward surface,

wherein, when each of the movable members is in the first position, the movable member outward surface is substantially coplanar with the fixed member outward surface of the fixed member to which the movable member is coupled,

wherein, when each of the movable members is in the second position, the movable member outward surface is not substantially coplanar with the fixed member outward surface of the fixed member to which the movable member is coupled; and

further comprising at least two hinge members, each hinge member coupling one of the fixed members to one of the movable members, each hinge member is made of a woven fabric material.

2. The casket of claim **1**, wherein each side panel structure includes an inner side panel, wherein each fixed member has an inward surface that abuts the inner side panel.

3. The casket of claim **2**, wherein:

each of the inner side panels includes a side panel inward surface, which is arranged facing toward the inner side

panel of the other of the side panel structures of the casket, and an opposing side panel outward surface, and

each of the fixed members abuts the side panel outward surface of a corresponding one of the inner side panels.

4. The casket of claim **1**, wherein:

each of the hinge members is directly coupled to one of the fixed members and directly coupled to one of the movable members.

5. The casket of claim **1**, wherein:

each fixed member has a fixed member inward surface opposite the fixed member outward surface,

each movable member has a movable member inward surface opposite the movable member outward surface, and

when each of the movable members is in the first position, the movable member inward surface is substantially coplanar with the fixed member inward surface of the fixed member to which the movable member is coupled.

6. The casket of claim **1**, further comprising:

two end cover panels, each end cover panel coupled adjacent to one of the end panels, each end cover panel having an end cover panel top surface that is arranged at a distance from the bottom panel,

wherein each of the fixed members has a fixed member top surface that is arranged at the distance from the bottom panel.

7. The casket of claim **6**, further comprising:

a lid configured to contact at least one of the end cover panels and at least a portion of each of the fixed members so as to cover at least a portion of an interior dimension formed by the bottom panel, the side panel structures and the end panels.

8. The casket of claim **7**, wherein:

the lid is configured to cooperate with the end cover panel top surface of the at least one of the end cover panels and the fixed member top surface of the at least a portion of each of the fixed members so as to be arranged approximately parallel to and spaced apart from the bottom panel.

9. A method of making a casket, the method comprising:

a) coupling two side panel structures to a bottom panel and coupling two end panels to the bottom panel to form, at least in part, a casket container configured to receive adult human remains, wherein each side panel structure includes a fixed member having a fixed member outward surface, each fixed member extending from a first of the two end panels to a second of the two end panels,

b) coupling at least one movable member to each of the fixed members such that each of the movable members is angularly rotatable relative to the fixed members between a first position and a second position,

wherein each of the movable members is coupled to one of the fixed members such that, when each of the movable members is in the first position, a movable member outward surface is substantially coplanar with the fixed member outward surface of the fixed member to which the movable member is coupled,

wherein each of the movable members is coupled to one of the fixed members such that, when each of the movable members is in the second position, the movable member outward surface is not substantially coplanar with the fixed member outward surface of the fixed member to which the movable member is coupled, and

wherein at least one of the fixed members includes an integrally formed fixed member stop surface to engage the moveable member in the second position to limit angular rotation of the movable member coupled to the fixed member.

10. The method of claim **9**, wherein:

step a) includes coupling a first fixed member to an outward surface of an inner side panel of one of the side panel structures, the outward surface of the inner side panel opposite an inward surface of the inner side panel, the inward surface of the side panel facing an inward surface of an inner side panel of the other side panel structure.

11. The method of claim **9**, wherein step b) further comprises coupling a first fixed member to a first of the moveable members using at least one hinge member.

12. The method of claim **9**, wherein:

the fixed member stop surface comprises a beveled edge of the fixed member.

13. The method of claim **9**, wherein at least one of the movable members includes an integrally formed movable member stop surface to engage the fixed member stop surface in the second position to limit angular rotation of the movable member coupled to the fixed member, and wherein the movable member stop surface comprises a beveled edge.

14. A casket, comprising:

two side panel structures and two end panels, each end panel operably coupled to both of the side panel structures;

a bottom panel coupled to both of the side panel structures and both of the end panels such that the bottom panel, the side panel structures and the two end panels form, at least in part, a casket container configured to receive adult human remains;

wherein each side panel structure includes a fixed member and a movable member, each movable member coupled to one of the fixed members such that each movable member is rotatable relative to the fixed members between a first position and a second position, each movable member having a stop surface, and each fixed member having a stop surface;

wherein, when each of the movable members is in the first position, at least a portion of the movable member is disposed directly below at least a part of the fixed member, and wherein the stop surface of the fixed member engages the stop surface of the moveable member in the second position, and wherein at least one of the stop surface of the movable member and the stop surface of the fixed member comprises a beveled edge.

15. The casket of claim **14**, wherein the fixed member is an integrally formed unitary member, and extends between and to each of the two end panels.

16. The casket of claim **15**, further comprising:

at least two woven hinge members, each hinge member coupling one of the fixed members to one of the movable members.

17. The casket of claim **16**, wherein each hinge member is directly coupled to one of the fixed members and directly coupled to one of the movable members.

18. The casket of claim **14**, wherein the stop surface of the movable member has the beveled edge.

19. The casket of claim **14**, wherein a first portion of the fixed member extends above the movable member in the first position, and a second portion of the fixed member extends below the movable member in the first position.

20. The casket of claim 19, wherein each movable member further comprises a notch configured to provide a handhold on the movable member.

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